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THE "TROILUS AND CRESSIDA" OF CHAUCER AND OF SHAKSPERE.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY.

LITERATURE is the index to the experience of humanity. Unless the world be steadily growing worse, posterity undoubtedly profits by both the good and the evil deeds, the successes and the failures, of its ancestry—imitating the one, avoiding the other; and thus every good man, no matter how insignificant his fame, has helped to advance the standards of truth and morality. There are practically but two methods by which this knowledge can be transmitted from one generation to another, and they are by word of mouth and by stroke of pen. Which method is the better is a much mooted question. Certain it is, however, that our knowledge of generations long since dead is acquired mainly by perusing the volumes which they have left us as our richest inheritance. The thoughts therein set down have been of great service to those whose privilege it has been to read them.

Chief among the number of those thus favored are to be found the names of Chaucer and Shakspeare. They were both students of human experience. They studied life as it had been and as it appeared to them. Each took subjects treated by earlier writers, and gave them to the people of his own day in the form which the time demanded, and each escaped the charge of plagiarism by "adorning whatever he touched." It is certainly something else than mere chance that impels two men, living centuries apart, to treat the same subjects, with the result that, through the medium of their works, posterity beholds the ruling spirit of the differing ages.

There are many well-known examples of this practice. Æschylus first told the story of Prometheus, the benefactor of mankind; how he was punished by Jupiter for disobedience, and how, by compromise alone, he could effect his release from endless torture. Two thousand years afterwards,

when the oppressed common people of Europe were bent on the annihilation of all monarchs and monarchies, and the regeneration of the world, Shelley recounted the sufferings of the noble Titan, and made him, instead of a bargainer for liberty, a rebel against all the powers of heaven and earth. Æschylus mirrored the belief of his day, Shelley of his. This fact is illustrated equally as well, perhaps, in the works of the two great Englishmen we are considering, who, since they were separated by an interval of two centuries, show the great changes which took place during that time, in the language and literature, as well as in the customs and beliefs of the English nation.

In making a comparative study of Chaucer and Shakspeare, we must bear in mind that, though both were Englishmen, they lived and wrote under very different conditions and circumstances; for, to use a seeming paradox, the England of Chaucer was not the England of Shakspeare. Great indeed were the changes which took place during the time that elapsed between their lives. England found itself in the time of Chaucer an old country, but a young nation. As was to be expected, there were many crudities apparent in the language and literature, as well as in society and its organ, the government. Moreover, the preceding two hundred years had added little, if anything, to its growth. But this long period had been one, not of degeneracy, but of recuperation, in which the people had been accumulating an energy which, when set at work, converted from potential into kinetic, would atone for all past idleness. Consequently, to aid us in understanding the relation which exists between Chaucer's and Shakspeare's works, we must make "an historic estimate of the conditions, antecedent and contemporary, which helped to make them what they were." Our comparison of the two ages will include only general points of similarity, or dissimilarity as the case may be, and must necessarily be brief.

At the time when Chaucer began his career England seemed to be a nation with no pride in the past and little hope for the future. A curtain of the blackest dye, woven

from the tyrannies of a long period of foreign dominion, seemed to enshroud the past in its spacious folds, and thus to forbid all contact with whatever bore the stamp of a strong, healthy English personality. But the hopes for the future, though not brilliant, were growing brighter and more encouraging every day. The English Reformation, headed by Wyclif, had great influence, not only upon religion and customs, but also upon literature. It gave to English literature, which was still in its infancy, many new ideas and a multitude of stimulating influences, by extending the domain of thought and enhancing the powers of expression. By the middle of the fourteenth century chivalry no longer constituted the foundation, but only an ornament of life—an ornament about which there was already being diffused the light of kindly consideration which age casts about all the follies, excesses, and mistakes of the past. In a short time the world had grown wiser and more practical, and it was with a feeling of intense gratification and relief that the men and women of that day were able to divert their minds from the narrow channels of reality to the infinite realms of romance; for chivalry was not yet all gone from the land—it had merely lost its supremacy. It had fulfilled its mission, and was just now in the dotage of its existence—the time when it had clear memories of its youthful pleasures and splendors, but was entirely oblivious to the rough buffets encountered during matured and declining manhood. But the conception of the ideal relation of knight and lady had lost little of its loftiness. And Chaucer’s poetry shows the effects of this dominant regard for woman as the divinely appointed comforter and helper of man, and of the esteem in which her virtues of constancy and chastity were held.

Though amid the glamour and pomp of chivalry, and the darkness of feudalism, there appeared to be no foundation, save sheer force of arms, upon which nations could build, deep down in this maelstrom there *was* a force which was soon to reduce chaos to order and turn darkness to light. This force was a craving which is deep-seated in human nature: the craving for the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

Until the fourteenth century learning had formed a very small part of the general civilization of England, but with Langland, Wyclif, and Chaucer a new era began. To these men, and to Chaucer most of all, belongs the glory for the mighty regeneration of thought and poetry and life which the Renaissance accomplished for England. They were the precursors of the Renaissance; indeed we may say that in them are seen the first rosy tints of the dawn of awakening reason, which soon dissipated the mists hovering about the records of the past, and placed modern classicism on an equality with ancient.

There was at that time no national literary tradition in England which Chaucer could have taken as his guide. Whatever poetry had preceded him was of a religious or minstrel character. Moreover, the language of England was composed of so many different elements, which had scarcely become harmonized, that a writer had great difficulty in expressing his thoughts in words intelligible to all. Chaucer realized that the English temperament and environment required a language different from any other, and made it his endeavor to establish one. So well has he succeeded that he has merited the title of "England's Father of Letters." The honor of establishing English court poetry is due to him alone. He early became acquainted with the court of England, and during his whole life was connected with it, visiting not a few of the Continental countries in the capacity of ambassador. While he was well acquainted with French court poetry, and was influenced by its artistic character, it was not until he visited Italy, that haven of rest and inspiration to English poets, and came under the influence of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, the great triumvirate of the Italian Renaissance, that he realized the full possibilities open to the man of letters. Dante and Boccaccio were his favorites. From Dante he derived his style and inspiration; from Boccaccio, his materials.

Shakspeare found everything more favorable to the pursuit of his art than Chaucer did. Chaucer lived before the Renaissance, and contributed his share to its progress. Shaks-

pere lived after this age, when thirst for knowledge had unearthed the treasures of classical antiquity, and enjoyed the benefits of the educated society which it created. Chaucer introduced English literature to the world, and gave it such a start that, by the time Shakspeare appeared, it was well under way toward the goal of perfection. Some say that this goal has been reached and that a decline has set in; others maintain that we are still progressing, with no signs of weakening. Be this as it may, it is certain that English literature made rapid strides in the two hundred years succeeding Chaucer, and that Shakspeare had the benefit of this national literary tradition. The form had changed during the interval, but the writer was not in doubt as to what the times demanded, and knew that nothing but the best would please or endure.

Shakspeare had as his contemporaries such gifted men as Kyd, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, dramatists of unquestioned ability. It was at the beginning of the seventeenth century that dramatic poetry reached its consummation, with Shakspeare as the master who gave it to the world in its definitive form. It is a noteworthy fact that Shakspeare and the English drama, as we now have it, were born at about the same time. They developed side by side, and each attained perfection through the other. Shakspeare's genius reached its consummation in the drama; the drama reached perfection in Shakspeare. It has been said that Chaucer stands at the beginning of the dramatic age of English literature, Scott at the end, while Shakspeare, its worthiest representative, occupies the middle ground. Chaucer and Scott undoubtedly possessed its rich inheritance, though the form of its manifestation in each was controlled by the spirit of his age. In the one it took the form of narrative poetry; in the other, that of the novel.

The little child loves to hear a simple story told in the simplest manner. But as it grows older, and its views of life broaden, it tires of simplicity and becomes interested in the life which it sees all about it. As the growth of the nation is analogous to that of the individual, and as the product

of each writer's mind is inseparably connected with his life, so the development of a national literature, as a mirror of life, is closely related to the history of the nation. The people of Chaucer's day required stories to be told to them in simple narrative poetry; but in Shakspeare's time, having grown older and more experienced in the affairs of national life, they demanded that humanity, with all its characters, be put upon the stage and made to act out its real or fancied existence there. The Renaissance and the Reformation, besides giving men desires for learning and for truth, had made life a thing of reality for them. They had come to see that there is more in life than the hope for something better; that neither the real nor the ideal should exclude the other, but that both are essential to true progress. Perfection cannot be attained without experience, but a spiritual desire must be coupled with this experience, or life will not be worth the living.

Shakspeare possessed qualities which will endear him to the people for all time, but he was also in close touch with his own age, the Elizabethan age, of which practical reality was the keynote. In such an era the drama was the most natural form of literature. The dramatist, more than writers of any other class, must be ruled by the conditions of life which exist around him. The Elizabethan dramatist had to have capacity for reproducing facts, and, what was most essential, his nature had to be such that he could take the experiences of life as they came to him; and then, having appreciated their significance, show them actuating his characters. In other words, the purpose of the drama then, as at all other times, was to set forth the actions, passions, and motives of men.

Having thus made an analysis, brief and incomplete as it is, of the condition of English life in the times of Chaucer and Shakspeare, let us now turn our attention to these men and see how each, as the exponent of his age, was controlled by it; not, however to the suppression of his own personality and genius. A happier means of doing this could not be desired than to study how each has aided in the develop-

ment of the romantic story of Troilus and Cressida, one of the tales belonging to the cycle of legends which the Middle Ages added to the original history of the siege of Troy.

The Trojan war has furnished characters and incidents for the writers of all ages. If all that has been written concerning that mighty conflict could be collected and woven into a connected story, it would make a volume so ponderous that Homer's Epic, voluminous as it is, would appear to be but the pedestal upon which was reared a column of gigantic proportions. The Middle Ages were especially productive of episodes and romances, which purported to have occurred during the siege of Troy, but which in reality originated in the fertile minds of later times. The story of Troilus and Cressida is one of these post-Homeric legends, which was exceptionally popular all over Europe, and which is one of a small number that attained enduring popularity. This is doubtless due to the fact that three of the world's great literary geniuses have deemed it worthy of their notice. Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakspeare—did not they possess the secrets of the magician, the power of imparting to mortality the breath of immortality?

In Chaucer's poem we find mention made of Dares, Dyte, (or Dictys), and Lollius as authorities from whom he derived his materials. The two former are probably fictitious names attached to mediæval histories of the Trojan war. As to the identity of Lollius, no one seems to have any certain knowledge. It is indeed a strange fact that Chaucer fails to mention Boccaccio, who is undoubtedly the author to whom he is most indebted for the story. Upon the basis which the Middle Ages furnished was built up a large structure of history and fiction. In Dares, while there is a description of Briseis, as the character of Cressida was first called, and mention of the exploits of Troilus, there is no connection between these characters. It remained for Benoît de St. Maure, a French *trouvère*, to expand and popularize the meager account given in the earlier histories, by creating the romance between Troilus and Cressida. In his work Briseis is the daughter of the Tro-

jan priest, Calchas, and the beloved of Troilus. He takes as the thread of his story the separation of Troilus and Briseis and her disloyalty to him while she resides among the Greeks. A century after Benoît, Guido de Colonna converted the French poem into Latin prose. He simply plagiarized the story and then concealed his authority. In this way his name extinguished that of Benoît, and he is credited with the original production. Boccaccio, in his "Filostrato," was the next to treat the subject, and under his treatment it grew perceptibly. He represented Griseida (changed from Briseis or Briseida) as a widow, instead of a maiden, and prefixed to the story of her inconstancy the account of Troilus' wooing and winning her. Pandarus, who plays so important a part in the story, as told by Chaucer and Shakspeare, was created by Boccaccio as the cousin of Cressida and the friend of Troilus.

Chaucer took the Italian poem and recreated it. He found Boccaccio telling a love story laid in the midst of warlike scenes, making war and love go hand in hand, dwelling little on the happiness of the early affection of the hero and the heroine, lingering long on the catastrophe and the pitiful story of broken vows and lost honor. But Chaucer's poem contains little of this warlike element. It reminds one more of peace and love than of war and love. The separation of the lovers, which is the turning point in the plot, is due to the fortunes of war; and with this and a few other references to the strife raging between Greek and Trojan Chaucer is contented. What though Achilles or Hector be victorious; what though the Greek sulk in his tent and the valiant Trojan dare him without avail to the fight? For this Chaucer cares little. His supreme interest lies in the story of overpowering love and inconsolable sorrow. He would have you

The double sorwes here
Of Troilus in loving of Criseyde
And how that she forsook him er she deyde.

He dwells long on the beginning and growth of Troilus and Cressida's love. In this he takes pleasure. Though

he would gladly omit the sad details after Cressida's fall, he feels constrained to relate them in verse that weeps under the load of sin and sorrow it is made to bear. In accordance with the dramatic inclinations of his genius, he has made many changes in the legend—changes which can be attributed neither to ignorance nor to oversight.

Chaucer begins his poem by enlisting our sympathies in the career of Cressida, who, by her father's shameful flight to the Greeks, has been left to the pitiless scorn of the indignant Trojans. Her pitiable condition before Hector exonerates her from all blame and her distress over her father's faithlessness are touchingly described. It is in a temple that Troilus, Priam's worthy son, first sees her, whither she has repaired, dressed in the somber weeds of mourning, made doubly appropriate to her, bereft of husband and deserted by father. Until now Troilus has never suffered from the “heats and colds of love,” neither has he met Cressida, and, thinking himself proof against Cupid's arrows, he has amused himself by mocking with ridicule and sarcasm those who do homage to the winged god of love. He sees Cressida and loves her. We are immediately interested in the rapid growth of his love for her, and can almost hear his sighs and complaints as he waits in suspense, hoping that she loves him, fearing that she does not. Through the instrumentality of Pandarus, the uncle of Cressida and the friend of Troilus, the love of the young prince is made known to her, and her own enkindled. With Troilus, it is love at first sight; with Cressida, a passion of very gradual growth. She is by nature morally inclined, and love, which some one has called the essence of woman's nature, is to her a thing of honor. And it is only through the trickery of Pandarus that she is betrayed into the commission of deeds, condemned, but not prevented, by our high standard of morality. After a short period of incomparable delight to the lovers, word comes from the Grecian camp that they will exchange the Trojan captive, Antenor, for the priest's daughter, Cressida. O, the sorrow and dejection this news causes in the hearts of the two

whom this exchange will separate! But obstinacy succeeds dejection. They will not be separated. They will escape from the land, leaving riches, titles, and kingdom for the humble cottage where love and happiness reign supreme. But they soon see the folly of such a course, and obstinacy is in turn replaced by forced submission. After a hard struggle against the commands of the Trojan leaders, Troilus agrees to submit to the cruel destiny of separation from his lady love. They part with vows of love and constancy, and resolutions to brave the dangers of a visit to the hostile camp, if only for the sake of the greeting and the parting kiss and the whispered word of love.

The pain of separation and fear for the future unite to make Troilus one of the most dejected of mortals. Sullen submission and hopes for the best rule him for a while. Time drags slowly and uneventfully by, yet his faith in Cressida will not permit him to doubt her. But hope, assailed first by damaging silence, then by distrust, and finally by indisputable evidence of its futility, cannot live forever in the human breast. At last he learns that his beloved is false. She has yielded to the entreaties of Diomedes, not from base motives, but from pity for his wounds and from the pressure brought to bear upon her by her father. But Troilus did not know her motives, and would not have believed had he heard them. When Cressida proved false, he lost faith in humanity. With the revelation of her falsity there came to him a feeling of revulsion toward everybody. Life and human association thus far had proved a snare, and he had no faith that they would ever be otherwise. Hope had been raised "Olympus high" by human affection, only to be trampled in the dust of ignominy and shame by human inconstancy. He had no use for the world, and thought it had none for him, so he sought release in death. But he longed to send to his account the Greek Diomedes, who had made life a hollow mockery for him by alienating the affections of his beloved Cressida. His thirst for vengeance, however, was never quenched. He fell at last, one of the noblest of the noble who were honored by a blow from the sword of the man-slaying Achilles.

Thus does Chaucer end his narrative of the sad story of Troilus and Cressida, beseeching that his readers, one and all, may understand the purpose of his work:

And red wherso thou be, or elles songe
That thou be understonde, I god beseche.

According to Chaucer, Troilus is the type of an honorable lover. We cannot say that his character is as strong as Hector's; neither can we call him effeminate. Until he begins to love Cressida he denies that there was any such thing as love. But he is overtaken by the avenging Nemesis and made to suffer for the scorn which he has heaped upon those who bear “sweet Amour's yoke.” The arrow of the god wounds him through the heart, and, as he feels the fluid in which its barbed point was dipped coursing his veins he is reduced to a state of complete collapse and submission. But he is reinvigorated by the knowledge that his love is returned, and yields himself to delights never experienced before. The stratagems to betray Cressida belong not to Troilus, but to Pandarus. After he has won her love, he prefers loss of life, and, what seems far worse to him, loss of honor, rather than divulge anything which might compromise her reputation. During the period of his separation from Cressida, while he yet believes in her, he vacillates from hope to fear and from fear to hope. But when he learns the fatal truth he does not descend to her level of shame and dishonor; he rises above his sensual passions and takes up the duties of leadership which devolve upon him when Hector falls a victim to “Achilles' baneful wrath.” That he deserved the honor of being Priam's son is evident from the loud praises sung to him for the many heroic deeds which he performs before death relieves him.

And Cressida, the fair, false Cressida, what else can we do but pity her after reading Chaucer? He has shown her so guileless, so free from base motives, that we can hardly believe that it was her intention to do wrong. The following words, which the poet puts in her mouth, clearly reveal his conception of the nobility of her love:

For trusteth wel, that your estat royal
 Ne veyn delyt, nor only worthiness
 Of yow in werre or torney marcial,
 Ne pomp, array, noble, or eek richesse,
 Ne made me to rewe on your distresse;
 But moral virtue, grounded upon trouthe,
 That was the cause I first hadde on yow routh!

Think what a mass of plotting and intrigue it took to lead her astray from the path of honorable love. And the very deeds which we condemn as immoral she refused to commit until assured of the honorableness of Troilus' love. As we see the meshes tightening about her, she seems like a bird swept about and bewildered while battling against the storm, yielding at last only because it can resist no longer. Chaucer's harshest judgment upon her would be that she was the victim of relentless destiny; that her feminine will, naturally weaker than man's, was overcome by the keen intellectual powers of Pandarus. For her failure to keep faith with Troilus, Chaucer lays the blame upon Diomedes and Calchas. Diomedes' persuasive powers and her father's authority are responsible for her inconstancy. To Chaucer she is woman's innocence pitted against man's guile and treachery, and her fall is inevitable. She is to be pitied, not blamed.

And if I mighte excuse hir any wyse,
 For she so sory was for hir untrouth
 Y-wis, I wolde excuse hir yet for routh.

She was the victim of fate, and fate decreed that she fall. He would gladly have given to her a character other than that which history gave her, but fidelity to his Muse constrained him to do otherwise.

In the delineation of the character of Pandarus Chaucer shows the best specimen of his handiwork. Rossetti has called this "one of the most complete pieces of character painting in our literature." The ingenuity shown in creating the part which he plays in the action of the story is worthy of a rank alongside that of the masters of plot. He it is who by deeds well meant succeeds in ruining two young lives. In him Chaucer finds the incarnation of fate,

and to him must be given the thanks for the little happiness the lovers enjoy, and the blame for the destruction of chastity and life. To him the poet assigns an office the very name of which is odious, and so well does he perform its duties that his name becomes a synonym for the broker in human passions. But Chaucer does not visit him with the contempt which rightfully belongs to him. He partially justifies the low, dishonorable acts of Pandarus on the ground of his great friendship for Troilus. He makes out a friendly, kind-hearted man, so self-sacrificing and obliging that, rather than see his friend languish and suffer under the pain of unrequited love, he is willing to overlook the odium which his part brings upon him in delivering his niece to the arms of Troilus. But all Chaucer's excuses and evasions of the truth, which he evidently recognized, cannot make us believe that he did not think Pandarus guilty of a great moral crime, and worthy of our utmost contempt. A middle-aged man, well taught in the affairs of life, he goes about his work equipped with a scheming mind and an artful tongue, and soon shows that he is a master of his art. In him are found the qualities best suited to the deceiving trickster. As the occasion demands, he assumes the rôle of the wise counselor, the garrulous fault-finder, the cynical scoffer, the cheering humorist, or the sympathetic friend. Here the poet puts himself in a dilemma. He would have us excuse Troilus and Cressida on the ground of their youth and their good intentions; he would have us excuse Pandarus also, alleging that he was prompted by his mighty friendship for Troilus. But we are bound to blame *somebody* for this great sin. So if Chaucer endeavors to make Troilus and Cressida appear young and inexperienced, and hence not to be judged too harshly, does he not thereby paint the character of Pandarus in blacker colors?

Shakspeare has made little change in the plot as Chaucer presents it. His alterations consist principally in intensifying the dominant traits of Chaucer's characters. Troilus has become more fervent; Cressida, more wanton; Pandarus, more despicable. Moreover he has laid the plot of the love

story in a modern version of the Trojan war, and the din of the combat sounds in our ears as we watch with interest the growth and the blasting of Troilus' love for Cressida—for in Shakspeare Cressida does not love Troilus, she lusts after him. Shakspeare had as accessible authorities Lydgate's "Troy Book," Caxton's "History of the Destruction of Troy," Chaucer's poem, and Chapman's "Translation of Homer." Probably he derived his love story from Chaucer, and his story of the Greek camp from Chapman's translation of the "Iliad."

There has been much discussion about Shakspeare's intention in treating as he did the heroes engaged in the Trojan war. Some declare that it was his purpose to ridicule Homer's epic; others insist that his sarcasm is directed against the mediæval histories of the war. Shakspeare himself offers no solution of the problem, and it will probably never be solved. But it is a fact that he has deprived those old heroes of much of the esteem which Homer reared for them in our minds. Homer's characters are drawn with a masterly hand; but they seem to be men set apart from the world, where common mortals never tread. They approach very near to the Greek idea of a god. Shakspeare has, to say the least, made them more human. Homer wrote an epic poem which has resisted, unharmed, all the ravages of time. Shakspeare wrote a drama of real life. He has deprived each member of that great galaxy of heroic men of much of the upright bearing and the dignity which they have worn for centuries, while clad in the armor of justifiable hero worship which Homer gave to them. To Homer they were heroes engaged in a national war; and, as such, were subject to no passions save hatred and revenge, to which, in those days, even the gods did homage. To Shakspeare they were beings of the same species with ourselves—no better and no worse than the common run of men—and subject to all the passions to which flesh and blood are heir. They were not above petty strifes and jealousies or the degrading influences of amorous intrigue. In short, he has taken them from their settings of gold in

history and sacred mythology, and placed them in the dross of everyday life.

Shakspeare has taken the weak points in Homer's characters and made them dominant traits of his own. Achilles, who in Homer refused to fight because Agamemnon deprived him of his captive Briseis, has in Shakspeare withdrawn from the fight, taking Patroclus with him, because Hecuba tempts him with her daughter Polyxena; he will not fight Hector hand to hand, but overpowers him with his Myrmidons, and then strikes the fatal blow. Ajax is nothing but a brutal fighter; Agamemnon, a slave to his passions; Hector, a brave and mighty warrior, is destroyed by his overweening ambition; Ulysses and Nestor have descended from wise counselors to crafty politicians. Thersites, the deformed jester of Homer, has become the foul garrulous reviler, whom Coleridge has characterized as the “Caliban of demagogic life; an admirable portrait of intellectual power, deserted by all grace, all moral principle, all, not momentary, impulse.” The foul abuses of this arch reviler so far surpass everything of their kind that we can scarcely deny them the name of eloquence.

There are three threads of Shakspeare's drama: the first being the story of Troilus and Cressida; the second, the story of the career of Hector; and the third, the story of Achilles, Ajax, Ulysses, and the Greek camp. It is with the first that we are especially interested, and to which we shall now confine our attention.

Shakspeare agrees with Chaucer not only in his idea of the essential features of the plot, but also in his conception of the character of Troilus. He pictures his hero as a noble youth, enamored, for the first time, with a young and beautiful woman, who appears to him to be the incarnation of all that is beautiful, good, and true. That his love has a sensual element in it, we cannot deny; but when we consider that impetuosity and boldness often predominate in youth, even in our own day of high moral and mental development, we prefer not to condemn Troilus' love as mere sensuality. He is

As true as truth's simplicity,
And simpler than the infancy of truth,

and he deems all others to be of like nature. Noble and guileless himself, he cannot conceive that his fair Cressida is capable of sin or deceit. His own heart is open to the sight of all, and he mistakes the unruffled exterior of others for an index to a peaceful heart. He easily mistakes Cressida's coquetry for bashful trepidation. Young and inexperienced, he does not suspect her true nature, while old Ulysses reads her like a book. Chaucer's Troilus strives to keep his relationship with Cressida secret, and does nothing to damage her reputation. But Shakspeare lets him show no hesitancy about proclaiming abroad the fact that he has succeeded in winning her affections. Herein does Chaucer surpass Shakspeare in portraying Troilus' nobility. But when the great calamity has fallen upon him, his true manhood asserts itself. He rises from the ruins of his love, with its joys and sorrows, shakes off all memories and regrets for the past, and enters bravely upon his duties as leader of the Trojan forces, a sadder and a wiser man. His purity has suffered little from its contact with impurity. But the experiences of that brief time have made the boy a man, and, from the standpoint of a man, he is able to behold, with vision clarified by sorrow and disappointment, how true it is that the world does not always prove to be just what youthful hopes and aspirations predict.

In the treatment of Cressida's character the two poets show a marked dissimilarity. In Chaucer she is an honorable and virtuous woman, who is led astray through the trickery of her uncle; in Shakspeare she is corrupt by her own choice, a slave yet a lover of her passions. Chaucer lived before the chivalrous regard for woman and her weakness had waned, and his heart was very warm toward the sex. Despite all Cressida's faults, he loves her and cannot believe that she is wantonly impure. He pities her, and seeks to make others do likewise. But Shakspeare lived at a time when corruption was riot, when the frequent charge of infidelity scarcely caused the eyelids to lower, or

the blush of shame to mount to the cheek. He knew that many a fair face hid a false heart, and felt no pity for the hypocritical Cressida, no compunction for giving her a character consistent with her actions. At first even the reader is deceived by her show of innocence, but he does not long remain in doubt. Shakspeare makes her a natural coquette. She was “won at the first glance,” but found it “hard to seem won.” She “holds off” in order to make Troilus’ love burn hotter, for “men prize the thing imagined more than it is.” She tempts him to kiss her, and then blushing says she didn’t mean it. She practises her art on Diomedes; but he, “bred in Ulysses’ school,” quickly fathoms her shallow nature, and parries her attacks with weapons like her own. Her language is light and full of indelicacy. Her actions throughout stamp her as one given over entirely to pleasure. When she arrives at the Greek camp she conducts herself like the “most abandoned prostitute.” She jests and sports with all. Unlike his contemporaries, Shakspeare makes purity the rule, and impurity the exception in his plays. Cressida is an exception to his conception of the female character. She is beautiful and intelligent, but she is not pure. Her nature is not capable of true love. Instead of love, mere sensuous impulse controls her. Throughout the play Shakspeare uses Ulysses as the mouthpiece for the expression of his own thoughts. It is Ulysses who propounds and explains all the grave questions which have given to the drama the title of “Shakspeare’s wisest play of worldly wisdom.” And it is Ulysses, the experienced man of the world, who voices Shakspeare’s opinion of Cressida:

Fie, fie upon her!
There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.
O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasps the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader! Set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity
And daughters of the game.

Again, in the character of Pandarus, Chaucer and Shakspeare differ greatly. Chaucer makes him an intimate and constant friend of Troilus, performing with eagerness services for the young nobleman, willing to overlook his own interests in order to minister to his friend's happiness. The bond of loyalty which unites him to Troilus is more binding on him than all the principles of morality. So, in conformity to what he considers the higher law, he utterly disregards the lower. He appears more like a man preëminently fitted by nature to his work than like the skilled practitioner of his art. He tries one experiment after another until he finds one which accomplishes his purpose. But in Shakspeare it is not love for Troilus, but appetite for what is gross and immoral that makes him pursue his vile occupation. Here, more than in Chaucer, he shows himself to be an experienced master of his business. The one ruse which he employs to bring the lovers together is successful. And when all the plotting and scheming is done, he stands aside chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands, as he beholds his devilish plans mature to his entire satisfaction. Shakspeare has given him such a character that his name remains to-day a synonym for any one who has sunk so low as to traffic in the sins of humanity. So well are the three leading characters of the love story depicted, that the world has deemed it best to grant the prayer of Pandarus: "Let all the pitiful goers-between be called to the world's end after my name; call them all Pandars; let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressidas, and all brokers-between Pandars."

Chaucer is, without doubt, Shakspeare's superior in narrative and descriptive poetry; but when it comes to a question of dramatic ability, he must bow to the "bard of Avon." The time is not yet ripe for the drama, and it is not his intention to create characters and incidents, but to narrate the simple story as history has it. In this he succeeds admirably. His poem is marked by many beautiful scenes from nature, frequent sallies of genuine wit and humor, and many touches of tenderest pathos. He is, however, lacking in dramatic incidents and climaxes. There is, we must con-

fess, a sameness in the poem, which amounts at times to tediousness, and gives weight to the argument that Chaucer is "long-winded." But there is a charm in his poetry, and something in his sympathetic pleading for our kindly consideration of the unfortunate Cressida, which strikes an answering chord in our breasts. But Shakspeare's drama is the antithesis of Chaucer's poem. It is replete with incident, such as only the actions of real men and women can give to it. It bristles all over with passages which show that the author was neither ignorant of classical learning nor untaught in the school of experience. His "small Latine and lesse Greek" may have seemed so in his day, but in ours there are many so-called scholars who could learn from him. Just what he meant by subjecting the Grecian and Trojan heroes to his sarcasm, it is hard to determine. Here, as elsewhere, when he seeks to escape the penetration of the inquisitive, he takes refuge behind his impenetrable humor. Ulrici's statement probably comes as near the truth as we shall ever get. He says: "Shakspeare had no desire to debase the elevated, to deteriorate or make little the great, and still less to attack the poetical worth of Homer, or of heroic poetry in general. But he wished to warn, though roughly, against overvaluation of them, to which man so willingly abandons himself. He endeavored at the same time to bring strikingly to view the universal truth that everything that is merely human, even when it is glorified with the nimbus of poetic ideality and a mythical past, yet, seen in the bird's-eye perspective of pure moral ideality, appears very small."

In one respect, at least, Shakspeare must yield the first place in popular approval to Chaucer. Chaucer's personages all appeal to and interest us; Shakspeare's, though equally as well drawn as Chaucer's, do not. The early poet has much sympathy with his characters, and tries, with no little success, to enlist that of his readers in them. He often excuses the actions of his personages, base and immoral though they be. Even after Cressida's fall, Chaucer makes her preserve, by means of her natural modesty and

sense of propriety, the semblance of purity. For this hypocrisy there are arguments no less weighty than that "truth, however glaring, should be known." But Shakspeare has no sympathy with his characters, and awakens none in us. All his characters are much less worthy of our admiration and respect than Chaucer's are. Both writers are gifted in characterization, but in a different way. Shakspeare is analytic; Chaucer is descriptive.

It is surely an evidence of divine legislation that mankind has been made with such a sense of truth and right that the standards of morality which have obtained in the different ages have agreed in all their important particulars. In their principles of morality Chaucer and Shakspeare agree, and the moral teachings in their presentation of the old story harmonize. They both recognize the immorality of the lovers, but they condemn it in different ways. Chaucer tries to palliate the offense, and thus lessen its evil influence. He does this under the guise of pity. But Shakspeare conceals nothing and makes immorality teach its own lesson. He puts Cressida in a position where none can mistake her character, and makes her

A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at.

As we study the productions of these two great poets we cannot but stand lost in wonder and admiration before the marvelous powers which produced them. Their works differ much in form and subject-matter, but notwithstanding this they have much in common. A grace and a freshness of style, an ease and inexhaustible variety of expression, elasticity and vivacity of dialogue, and the faculty of never sleeping—all these Chaucer and Shakspeare possess. Each has taken the story of Troilus and Cressida and stamped it indelibly with the unmistakable marks of his own personality and genius. And on their literary monuments the world has placed the evergreen wreath of sympathy and approval. But the results of their labors did not stop with the embellishment of myths and legends, and the creation of characters

as real as any we see in actual life. Their works will serve but for time; the influence of these same works will serve for eternity. The time *may* come when there shall be few who know by personal acquaintance the effects of Chaucer's or Shakspeare's teachings; but, unless the world degenerates greatly, humanity will never outlive the good influence which these poets, though long since beyond the sphere of human association, are exercising over the lives of their readers. The prominence now given to the study of their productions shows how their influence has been increasing in power, and extending wider and yet wider, until now the whole cultured world is kneeling in grateful recognition of their gifts.

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